

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION



PLANNING ISSUE #9: DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

DISCUSSION, DIRECTIONS + RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
REVISIONS TO THE OFFICIAL PLAN

MIDLAND OFFICIAL PLAN REVIEW

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Purpose

As evidenced by the recent completion of the 2015 Downtown Master Plan, the Downtown acts as an important anchoring point for the Midland community. Furthermore, the Downtown has retained a robust economic and commercial role within the Town, despite larger format commercial development occurring peripherally along the highways. This report will explore options and Directions to continue to strengthen the Downtown, ensuring that peripheral commercial development does not create direct competition and that the Downtown continues to play a critical role in serving the local needs of the community.

This report will also review and summarize the relevant policies in Provincial planning, the Simcoe County Official Plan and municipal documents including the 2015 Downtown Master Plan, and the Town Official Plan.

How this report is laid out

This report, and all “planning issue” reports for this phase of the Midland Official Plan Review (OPR), are structured to provide a clear understanding of the policy background and basis for the various matters to be addressed in the OPR.

The reports begin with the policy background consisting of the applicable Provincial, County and municipal policies and reports in a blue inset box. The policy background is followed by the public comments received on each planning issue. These sections then feed into a discussion of the issues, through which guiding Directions are identified, and the consultant recommendations for the OPR based on these Directions.

Policy Background

Provincial Policies

Policy Reference - Provincial Policy Statement (2014): Section 1.7 (Long-Term Economic Prosperity).

- The PPS states that long-term economic prosperity should be supported by:
 - Promoting opportunities for economic development and community investment-readiness
 - Maintaining and, where possible, enhancing the vitality and viability of downtowns and mainstreets
 - Promoting the redevelopment of brownfield sites (Policy 1.7.1 a), c) and e))

County Policies

Policy Reference - Simcoe County Official Plan, Modified as per Approval August 31st, 2015 (Updated March 10, 2016): Section 3.5 (Settlements).

- Under Policy 3.5.26 the downtowns and main streets of primary settlement areas are the focal points for residential, commercial, and institutional uses, and shall:
 - Establish safe and pleasant pedestrian environments that encourage movement by foot, bicycle and transit
 - Provide attractive streetscapes
 - Encourage downtown economic development initiatives
 - Provide a range of housing types and costs

Existing Midland OP Policies

Policy Reference - Town of Midland Official Plan (2002): Section 3.2 (Downtown District).

- Section 3.2 Downtown District of the Town OP identifies objectives and development policies for the area to ensure the importance of the Downtown as a primary focus for the Town with King Street the main focus of commercial activity.
- The objectives for the Downtown area include:
 - Focus of commerce, culture, tourism, hospitality, and institutional activities
 - Promotion of the historic importance, qualities and opportunities of the Downtown

- Enhancement and promotion of the interconnection of the built core area with the waterfront area
- Promotion and encouragement of mixed commercial/residential development to support the area (Policy 3.2.1 a) to d))
- The Town OP includes a number of development policies for the downtown area under Policy 3.2.3 that promote and support the revitalization of the area:
 - a) Pedestrian use should be facilitated whenever possible. This includes well-maintained sidewalks, handicapped access, lighting, street furniture, vegetation and other appropriate features designed to provide for an appealing and comfortable setting
 - b) As deemed appropriate, the Town will implement improvements in the street system to facilitate accessibility, traffic movements and the separation of pedestrians and vehicular traffic
 - c) Municipal parking, including on-street parking and off-street parking lots, should be located so as to offer convenient parking facilities, which support the business activities of the area. This may be done in conjunction with an ongoing plan for acquisition of land for parking purposes
 - d) It is recognized that the assembly of land for parking purposes is also a form of commercial land banking. In the event that the Town should wish to dispose of such lands, this action should be substantiated by an appropriate impact study
 - e) On-site parking may not be required where Council is satisfied that adequate alternatives exist. The implementation of this policy is intended to encourage development and re-development, which might otherwise not be possible or practical. Cash-in-lieu or the exemption from cash-in-lieu for parking may be considered by Council. See Section 8.5 for additional policies
 - f) The Municipality may investigate and implement cooperative programs to improve the attractiveness and image of public and private properties. This may include the development of a downtown theme to recognize the area's historical importance. Efforts to integrate existing and new buildings both architecturally and aesthetically, façade design improvements and improvements to the rear of buildings regarding access and visual impact shall be endorsed
 - g) The Municipality should encourage and support merchant and business groups whose goal is to improve the Downtown District
 - h) The provision of Public Open Space within the District is recognized as an essential component for the enjoyment of workers, residents and visitors. Visual and pedestrian linkage between the downtown and the Town dock/waterfront

is encouraged. This connection to the Town dock and associated waterfront and trail system is an extremely important component in regard to the long-term success of the District

- i) Residential uses are recognized and encouraged in the Downtown District. An increased residential presence will be supportive of business and cultural activities and reinforce the community focus of the area. High and medium density residential development and mixed commercial/residential development are permitted in accordance with the policies of the Residential Section, 3.3. Residential uses, associated with commercial uses, should be located above the ground floor. On King Street, ground floor uses shall be reserved for retail and business use. Residential development, although viewed as an important aspect within this designation, is not a primary use and as such should not interfere with commercial and business uses and may not enjoy the setbacks, separations and buffering that might be expected elsewhere

Previous Plans and Studies

Downtown Master Plan, 2015

The role of the strategic master plan is to build on the Downtown's many assets and identify the improvements needed to maximize the Downtown's potential as a place to live, enjoy and prosper. This discussion focuses on what elements of the Downtown Master Plan Report need to be included in the new OP. The report sets out a broad set of goals and guidelines for both private development and public investment. It also identifies key initiatives to be pursued over the next 20 years, including "priority projects" for the next 2-5 years.

The report is also a Community Improvement Plan (CIP). Section 42 of the Ontario *Planning Act* allows municipalities to establish Community Improvement Areas and prepare Community Improvement Plans aimed at revitalizing targeted areas through municipally driven or incentive-based programs.

The report notes that the Town's current OP has policies that support the Downtown as a location for commercial retail uses, businesses and services. The Downtown has its own land use designation (Downtown District) in order to maintain its role as a central business district, foster its history, reinforce the interconnectedness of the Downtown and the waterfront, and to promote mixed uses. The Downtown District land use policies allow a mix of business, commercial, cultural and open space uses, and specifically encourage residential uses to be located in the Downtown. Standalone wholesale retail that is "appropriate" for Downtown is permitted at the Downtown's periphery, while wholesaling uses which are accessory to a business are permitted everywhere within the Downtown (p. 19).

Below illustrates improvements on King Street from Midland's Downtown Master Plan and Community Improvement Plan.



The Downtown Master Plan proposes a number of built form, public realm and programming improvements that will improve the Downtown's liveability and vitality, and increase its attractiveness to new businesses, residents and tourists.

The plan begins with an overall vision and goals for the Downtown to guide future development and investment.

Vision:

Downtown Midland will be a green, beautiful and vibrant place, where area residents will go routinely to shop, dine, work, learn, play or be entertained, and where visitors will stay to enjoy the Region's many cultural and recreational attractions.

Seven Goals:

1. Provide more things to do downtown
2. Improve the pedestrian experience downtown
3. Beautify the waterfront and connect it to the downtown core
4. Attract more businesses
5. Improve connections to neighbourhoods and places outside downtown
6. Draw more day and overnight visitors to downtown
7. Stimulate more residential development

20 Key Initiatives are proposed, which include:

1. New Waterfront Park
2. Waterfront Park Expansion
3. Bayshore Drive Realignment
4. Waterfront Development
5. New Market Square
6. King Street Rejuvenation
7. New Pedestrian Crossings on King Street
8. King-Yonge Intersection Improvements
9. Midland Avenue Streetscape Enhancements
10. Potential Parking Structure
11. Cross-street Streetscape Enhancements
12. Potential Educational Institution
13. First Street Infill Development
14. First Street Streetscape Enhancements
15. Special Event Programming
16. Parking Strategy Initiative
17. Façade Improvement
18. Building Renovations
19. BIA Boundary Expansion
20. Improved Signage & Wayfinding

Public Comments

- The following policies are needed to implement the Downtown Master Plan and to ensure that the Downtown continues to support the community for the next 20 years:
 - policies to ensure the integration of the waterfront and the Downtown
 - policies to protect green space/natural areas
 - policies to protect public parking within the Downtown
 - policies to promote the Downtown
- Downtown Midland is unique, it offers a range of shops and is walkable. Big box stores do not offer the same type of experience.
- The Downtown can become a promotional centre. Opportunity to re-purpose old buildings to have the Downtown become an office hub.
- The Downtown has opportunities for year round tourism including tourist attractions, destinations (cultural centre, Quest Art), having later business hours for restaurants and streetscaping to accommodate for festivals and events.
- Low-rise mixed use residential, commercial/retail and seniors residences would be compatible with the Downtown. High-rise buildings may not be compatible with the Downtown.
- In the new Official Plan, a heritage district should be designated to identify important buildings in specific areas. Consultation with aboriginal groups should occur to identify and protect Cultural Heritage Resources.

Discussion

Maintaining the health of the Downtown

- Like the Georgian Bay Waterfront, the Downtown is an important and highly cherished part of the Town of Midland. Its protection and enhancement are of interest to the Province, the County and the Town. Provincial and County planning frameworks identify downtowns and main streets as focal points for residential, commercial, and institutional uses, and require the Town to:
 - Establish safe and pleasant pedestrian environments that encourage movement by foot, bicycle and transit;
 - Provide attractive streetscapes;
 - Encourage downtown economic development initiatives; and

- Provide a range of housing types and costs.
- The existing Official Plan certainly recognizes the significance of the Downtown and identifies it with its own land use designation and policy framework in Section 3.2 “Downtown District”. The consultation process for this Official Plan Review established as a **Guiding Principle**:
 - Preserve and promote the Downtown's strong historical and cultural heritage through restoration, revitalization, careful intensification and programmed activities.
- In recognition of the significance of the Downtown, the Town recently adopted a Downtown Master Plan, 2015. The role of the Master Plan is to build on the Downtown's many assets and identify the improvements needed to maximize the Downtown's potential as a place to live, enjoy and prosper. The Master Plan sets out a broad set of goals and guidelines for both private development and public investment. It also identifies key initiatives to be pursued over the next 20 years, including “priority projects” for the next 2-5 years.
- The Master Plan is also a Community Improvement Plan. Section 42 of the Ontario *Planning Act* allows municipalities to establish Community Improvement Areas and prepare Community Improvement Plans aimed at revitalizing targeted areas through municipally driven or incentive-based programs.
- As a result, the Town should utilize the findings and planning framework of the Downtown Master Plan Report to facilitate development and financial incentives that promote change.
- To build on the improvements and investments outlined in the Downtown Master Plan, the Town should also consider policies for a King Street Focus Area that includes a vision for redevelopment, and a scoped list of permitted uses that are focused on creating an animated, pedestrian-friendly area for local residents and tourists – rather than general commercial permissions. This would discourage or prohibit auto-oriented uses and built forms, while permitting new higher density residential uses as part of the land use mix.
- Although the Downtown is currently functioning well, there is a risk that if certain commercial uses are permitted outside of the Downtown, this could impact its function and health. Some issues that this raises include:
 - As per the findings of the 2015 Commercial and Industrial Land Needs Update, the existing supply of commercial lands located outside of the core significantly exceeds the amount of space that could reasonably be developed over the next 25 years. Restricting the designation of more commercial lands may be necessary to protect the viability of the Downtown.

- Should certain types of uses be regulated in the OP to specific commercial areas? The Downtown Master Plan states that, to strengthen the Downtown, the Town should consider restricting the types of retail and service uses that are permitted along the highways, as these corridor areas can threaten the vitality of the Downtown (p. 17). Conversely, large format “Big Box” commercial developments could be regulated to the Highway 12 and Jones Road area.

Stemming from these discussion points is one **Direction** which frames the policy recommendation below.

Direction:

1. The Town should continue the work started through the 2015 Downtown Master Plan to ensure an appropriate land use mix, built form and public realm.

Directions + Recommendations

Direction #1: The Town should continue the work started through the 2015 Downtown Master Plan to ensure an appropriate land use mix, built form and public realm.

It is recommended that:

- a) Section 3.2 “Downtown District” be revised to include the relevant recommendations of the **Downtown Master Plan**, including the Vision, Goals and Key Initiatives that will guide future development and investments throughout the Downtown.

This revision will be substantial, notwithstanding there is no requirement to do so, in order to conform to Provincial and County planning frameworks.